



# Characteristics of Arizona school districts in improvement



Summary



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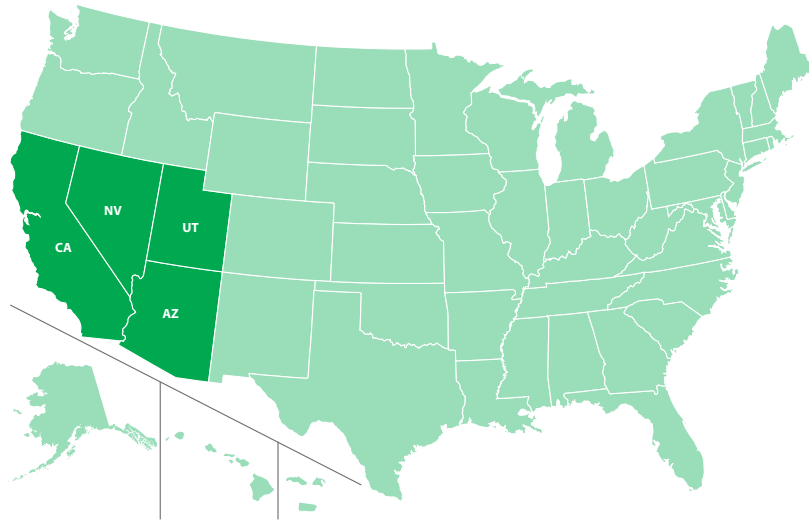
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# Characteristics of Arizona school districts in improvement

**This descriptive analysis provides a statistical profile of Arizona's lowest performing school districts, which can inform the context for district improvement as Arizona rolls out and refines its district intervention strategies.**

Policymakers in Arizona and the other states served by the West Regional Educational Laboratory, like their counterparts across the country, are actively addressing the school and district improvement requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. They have developed criteria based on assessment and accountability data to identify and intervene in schools and districts in need of improvement. School improvement efforts are largely defined and in place, but they do not reveal the full accountability picture for policymakers. Less is known, both in Arizona and nationally, about districts in improvement.

Education decisionmakers in Arizona and other states in the West Region have requested more information about the characteristics of districts in improvement. This descriptive analysis provides a statistical profile of Arizona's lowest performing school districts. As Arizona rolls out and refines its district intervention strategies, this profile can inform the critical work on districts in improvement. Data for the study came from the Arizona

Department of Education School Effectiveness Division and from the Common Core of Data maintained by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Under the NCLB Act each state must operate a two-level education accountability system, with one level focused on school performance and the other on district performance. Separate accountability calculations are made for schools and for districts, which makes it possible for individual schools to have a different accountability status from their district. In Arizona making adequate yearly progress requires satisfying up to 37 requirements. Arizona's local school districts first became subject to improvement in 2004/05 if they had failed to make adequate yearly progress in the two previous years in the same content area or reporting category.

A key finding of this study is that the district level of Arizona's NCLB-driven accountability system is identifying problems that are missed at the school level. An examination of how Arizona's 218 multiple-school districts and more than 1,500 schools did on these individual adequate yearly progress requirements reveals that in 2005/06—the year on which the 2006/07 district in improvement designations were based—66 districts (39 of them in improvement) failed to make adequate yearly

progress on at least one requirement, even though all their schools made adequate yearly progress on that same requirement. In addition, seven districts failed to make adequate yearly progress in the aggregate, even though not one school in those districts failed to do so. In 2006/07, 24 districts in improvement had no schools identified for improvement.

In these cases districts were being held accountable for student subgroups whose performance was not tracked by school-level accountability rules because there were too few students in the subgroup at each school to meet the minimum subgroup size (40 or more) in Arizona for reporting under the NCLB Act. This occurred most often for the students with disabilities subgroup. While such inconsistencies may appear counterintuitive at first, they reflect the effectiveness of a two-level accountability system—with the district-level system picking up, monitoring, and being accountable for students missed by the school-level system.

In Arizona 77 (35 percent) of the 218 multiple-school districts included in the district accountability system were in improvement in 2006/07, and districts in improvement enrolled more than 610,000 (60 percent) of the 1.01 million public school students in the state. Just over one in eight students enrolled in a district in improvement (about 81,000 altogether) was also enrolled in a school in improvement.

Districts in improvement differed from other districts in many ways. They were generally

larger, with more schools and students—13 of the 17 largest districts were in improvement in 2006/07. Districts in improvement were more likely to be in cities or urban fringe areas than in towns or rural areas. Districts in improvement had higher proportions of Hispanic, American Indian, English language learner, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students and lower proportions of White students than did districts not identified for improvement.

In moving forward under the NCLB Act, Arizona's districts in improvement face tough challenges. None of the 77 districts met all adequate yearly progress criteria in 2005/06. Compared with other districts, districts in improvement were held accountable more often for the test performance of the following student subgroups that met the minimum threshold size of 40: African American students, Hispanic students, American Indian students, English language learner students, and students with disabilities. When held accountable, less than half of districts in improvement met the proficiency targets for these subgroups. Since statewide proficiency targets are set to increase regularly in the years ahead, it is likely that districts already in improvement will have a difficult time climbing out. Furthermore, districts not identified for improvement will need to increase the percentage of students scoring proficient in order to continue making adequate yearly progress.

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